

HOLLYWOOD FIELD PIPELINE
AND
HIGHWAY 205
BOUNDARY FENCE
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA OR-027-02-059

Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The Hollywood Field of the South Steens Allotment is within the South Steens Wild Horse Herd Management Area (HMA) in the vicinity of where the South Loop Road meets Highway 205 (see attached location map). State Highway 205 runs through the middle of the Hollywood Field and for many years wild horses grazed on both sides and along the highway which created a safety hazard. There was and is a hazard from people viewing the horses while driving and stopping along the highway to view and photograph the horses.

The Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act (Steens Act) of October 2000 authorized several land exchanges which transferred public land into private ownership and private land into public ownership. The portion of South Steens Allotment within Hollywood Field west of Highway 205 was intermixed public and private lands and the public land was transferred to private ownership by an exchange authorized under this Act. The private land was subsequently fenced which has increased the safety hazard, with wild horses trailing along Highway 205 and frequently on the highway. The change in ownership and fencing also removed the Catlow wetlands which was used by the wild horses in the area as a water source, leaving only one reliable water source within the Hollywood Field. This also increased the frequency of wild horses trailing down the highway to water from Roaring Springs on the highway right-of-way. When cattle are licensed to graze in the Hollywood Field, they trail across the highway to a fenced private well with a 30-foot bottomless trough. This also is hazardous for vehicles traveling along this portion of the State highway.

The proposed action would be to fence the east side of the highway within the right-of-way and to place a 28-foot cattleguard on the Loop Road which would prevent wild horses and cattle from trailing on and along the highway. The proposed fence and cattleguard at the Loop Road would be constructed outside the highway right-of-way to the east of the Steens Mountain sign and information area to exclude cattle from this area. It is also proposed to run a pipeline from the private well underneath the highway approximately 1.3 miles to the southeast onto public land to provide a reliable water source east of the highway for wild horses and livestock. There would be a 16-foot bottomless trough and a pond which would have a dam less than 10 feet in height. The use of the well would be through a written cooperative agreement allowing the government to pump water for wild horses as necessary to provide the animals with a reliable water source. When the Hollywood Field was licensed for livestock use the permittee would have the responsibility to ensure the water was pumped.

There is a public demand to view the wild horses; however, for safety reasons viewing from the State highway is an issue as well as animals trailing across and lingering on the highway. This Environmental Assessment (EA) will analyze alternative locations of water sources and if a well is needed on public land or if a cooperative agreement with the use of the existing private well would be sufficient. The fencing and cattleguard would either be constructed or no action taken. There are no wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in the vicinity of any of the locations analyzed in this document as possible sites to locate structures.

CHAPTER II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. No Action Alternative

Under this alternative there would be no highway boundary fence constructed, no cattleguard installed on the South Loop Road and no pipeline, well or pond would be constructed on public land.

B. Proposed Action

Under the proposed action approximately 5 miles of 4-strand barbed wire fence would be constructed east of Highway 205 within the highway right-of-way. The fence would begin at the cattleguard at the turnoff to Plush, Oregon, and continue south to the fence at the Beckley turnoff. This fence would be built to standards for mule deer and antelope with the bottom wire smooth and spacing from the ground up being 16 inches, 22 inches, 30 inches, and 42 inches. A 28-foot cattleguard would be placed on the South Loop Road where this fence would intersect with the Loop Road (see the attached map for fence and cattleguard locations). At this location, the fence and cattleguard would be located east of the Steens portal sign outside the highway right-of-way to exclude livestock from this area. A cooperative agreement with Roaring Springs Ranch, Inc., would be developed to allow the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to use water from an existing well west of Highway 205 (T. 33 S., R. 32 E., Section 7, SW3NE3) and for BLM to connect a 2-inch PE pipe to the well and to bury the pipe across private land and transfer water via the pipeline to public land east of the highway approximately 1.3 miles southeast to a location in T. 33 S., R. 32 E., Section 17, NW3NE3. This location because of topography would have the trough and overflow pond out of view of the Loop Road and the highway. The steep hill between the proposed location of water and the Loop Road would prevent people from attempting to drive to the site from the Loop Road. These facilities would be located where the public could take a short walk (approximately 300 yards) from the Loop Road to view wild horses. Wild horses could be observed and photographed without disturbing the animals and without driving off road. The pipeline would be 2-inch PE pipe ripped to a depth of approximately 36 inches with a caterpillar tractor. The soil along the line would be put back to contour, seeded and dragged with a field harrow pulled by an ATV to cover the seed. The seed mixture would be crested wheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, squirreltail, and Wyoming sagebrush, if available. A 16-foot bottomless trough would be constructed at the end of the pipeline with an overflow pond. The trough would have wildlife escape ladders installed during construction. The pond would have a dam with a height of 10 feet or less. A cultural resource inventory and T&E plant inventory would be conducted before any ground-disturbing activities are authorized. Any effects to these resources would be mitigated before project authorization.

C. Alternative 1 (Pipe Water to Seeding)

This alternative is the same as the proposed action except water would be piped to a seeded area on public land in T. 33 S., R. 32 E., Section 8, NW3NE3. This would require approximately 1-mile of pipeline.

D. Alternative 2 (Public Land Well)

Under this alternative the fencing and cattleguard would be as described in the proposed action. A well would be drilled on public land in T. 33 S., R. 32 E., Section 17, NW3NE3 with the water piped into a trough and overflow pond in the same location and as described in the proposed action. There would be no pipeline except for approximately 15 to 20 feet from the well to the trough and the overflow pond. The well pump would be powered by a generator which would require a small shelter to house the generator which could be gasoline, propane, diesel or solar powered.

All alternatives analyzed in this document are in conformance with the 1982 Andrews Management Framework Plan (MFP); the 1983 Andrews Grazing Management Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS); the Steens Act; State, tribal, and local land use plans as well as all other pertinent laws and regulations.

CHAPTER III: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements

The following critical elements of the human environment are known to be present within the project area and/or affected by the enactment of the proposals:

1. Cultural Heritage

The project vicinity contains archaeological sites of low to moderate scientific importance. The potential for National Register eligible sites to occur within the actual proposed project location is low.

2. Noxious Weeds

There are known noxious weed infestations in the area. The known species are Mediterranean sage, Scotch thistle, and whitetop. The Highway 205 corridor is continuously subjected to new weed introductions. There is a noxious weed treatment plan to address when and what methods of treatment are applied.

3. Water Quality (Drinking/Ground Water)

No current or past uses in the area would affect surface or ground water quality.

4. Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

Approximately 1 square mile of the Blitzen River WSA (2-86E) is located in the northeastern corner of the Hollywood Field. There are no wilderness or WSAs within the project area being analyzed.

5. Migratory Birds

There are many species of neotropical songbirds found in the area, including ground nesters, cavity nesters and shrub nesters. These birds inhabit the area in the spring, summer, and fall, and many nest in this area.

6. Remainder of the Critical Elements

The remainder of the critical elements are nonexistent in the area or unaffected, specifically environmental justice, farmlands (prime or unique), floodplains, hazardous materials, American Indian religious concerns, paleontology, air quality, T&E animals, T&E plants, wetlands and riparian zones, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), and Wild and Scenic Rivers. These unaffected resources will not be discussed further in this document. There would be no adverse impact to energy sources.

B. Noncritical Elements

1. Current Livestock Management

The Hollywood Field is a small pasture (approximately 4,010 acres of public land) in the South Steens Allotment. This pasture was reduced in size due to a land exchange authorized by the Steens Act. The allotment has permitted livestock use as follows:

2,500 cattle - 03/01-03/15 @ 21% public land

4,000 cattle - 04/01-08/31 @ 67%

2,665 cattle - 09/01-10/31 @ 67%

2,500 cattle - 11/16-02/28 @ 21% = 19,133 AUMs.

The Hollywood Field is grazed in the spring and fall and functions as a trailing and gathering field used for short periods to allow cattle pairs to mother up following trailing. The amount of use varies from year to year as well as the timing of grazing.

2. Wild Horses

The Hollywood Field Pasture is within the South Steens Wild Horse HMA which has 151,144 acres of active HMA managed at an Appropriate Management Level (AML) of between 159 and 304 horses. Because of the size and proximity to Highway 205 the Hollywood Field is a popular viewing area for wild horses especially Steens Mountain pintos. The horses have free access to the highway which creates a safety hazard when they enter the roadway. Currently as many as 60 wild horses graze in this pasture.

3. Recreation

Most of the visitors to South Steens stop at the entrance sign on the South Loop Road just east of Highway 205 which is within the Hollywood Field Pasture. People stop and read the sign, check their maps and secure their loads before they drive the South Loop. As mentioned earlier this area is a popular wild horse viewing area with horses often in view from Highway 205 and the South Loop Road. Hunting for chukars, doves, antelope, and deer is also popular in this area.

4. Soils

The soils in the area are variable in depth from shallow to deep (less than 20 inches to 60+ inches) depending on the location on the landscape. Soils on the slopes are generally shallow whereas those in depressions and bottoms are deep. The moderately deep and deep soils have a lime horizon at approximately 25 to 30 inches with a loam surface texture. Many of these soils have coarse fragments throughout the profile.

5. Vegetation

The dominant vegetation community is Wyoming big sagebrush-bunchgrass. The associated species within this community are Thurber's needlegrass, prairie June grass, needleandthread grass, Indian ricegrass, cheatgrass, penstemons, lupines, phloxes, paintbrushes, and other associated forbs. On the shallow soils low sagebrush-bunchgrass plant communities are dominant. These plant communities have similar plant associations as described above for the Wyoming big sagebrush-bunchgrass communities. There are a few juniper trees scattered throughout both plant communities.

6. Visual Resource Management

The proposed project area is in a Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class 2 management objectives outlined in the land use plan. This VRM class outlines that management activities may be seen but should not attract the attention of the casual observer.

7. Wildlife

The proposed project area is within critical deer winter range. This area is also winter and spring range for sage-grouse as well as antelope. The area provides habitat for these species as well as chukars, mourning dove, valley quail, songbirds, jackrabbits, coyotes, bobcats, various raptors, reptiles, and a myriad of other small animals.

CHAPTER IV: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. No Action Alternative Anticipated Impacts

Critical Elements:

1. Cultural Heritage

There would be no impacts to cultural resources under the No Action Alternative.

2. Noxious Weeds

There would continue to be introductions of noxious weeds within the highway corridor disturbance area. There would be no additional disturbance from fence construction or on public land from pipeline or well construction. Therefore, the possible impacts of the spread of noxious would be less under the No Action Alternative.

3. Water Quality (Drinking/Ground Water)

There would be no impacts to drinking or ground water under the No Action Alternative.

4. Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

There are no wilderness or WSAs in the area of consideration, therefore, there are no impacts under the No Action Alternative.

5. Migratory Birds

There would be no impacts to migratory birds under the No Action Alternative.

Noncritical Elements:

1. Livestock Management

Under the No Action Alternative the direct effect would be that cattle would continue trailing across the highway for water with the resulting safety hazard for people driving on this section of Highway 205 being continued.

2. Wild Horses

Under the No Action Alternative the direct effect would be that horses would continue to graze along the highway and trail on the highway. This would continue the safety hazard for people driving on this section of Highway 205. There would continue to be an inadequate distribution of water and in many years inadequate volume of water for horses. Up to 60 resident animals stay in the Hollywood Field year-round and currently there is only one source of water (Solomon's Reservoir). The direct effect is for horses to trail to water at Roaring Springs along the highway. It might be necessary for the BLM to move the horses east into Steens Pasture when water becomes a limiting factor.

3. Recreation

There would be no impacts to recreation under the No Action Alternative.

4. Soils

There would be no impacts to soils under the No Action Alternative.

5. Vegetation

There would be no impacts to vegetation under the No Action Alternative.

6. Visual Resource Management

There would be no impacts to visual resources under the No Action Alternative.

7. Wildlife

There would be no impacts to wildlife under the No Action Alternative.

B. No Action Alternative (Cumulative Effects)

The cumulative effects of the No Action Alternative would be the continued safety hazard (possible loss of life or serious injury) to the public traveling the portion of Highway 205 which is currently the western boundary of the Hollywood Field. The removal of a water source due to exchange of public land to private has provided habitat for wild horses that is not sustainable without an additional water source.

C. Proposed Action Anticipated Impacts

Critical Elements:

1. Cultural Heritage

There would be potential impacts caused by water line and trough installation and overflow pond construction. There would also be potential for post installation/construction impacts due to wild horse and livestock congregation at the trough and the overflow pond. This would be mitigated during the cultural inventory by locating the structures away from areas with potential cultural sites.

2. Noxious Weeds

There are known noxious weed infestations in the area. Noxious weeds would have a potential site for establishment where the ground is disturbed during the construction of the fence and installation of the pipeline, trough, and overflow pond. The congregation of animals post construction around the watering facilities and along the fence line would provide further potential for noxious weed establishment.

To mitigate the potential for noxious weed establishment from construction activities, these sites would be monitored annually during the first two growing seasons to determine if any noxious weeds have established and any noxious weed plants located would be treated. Where there would be continued disturbance from concentrated animal use at the water trough, pond, and main trails to water, monitoring and treatment for weeds would occur annually. The noxious weed plan would be followed.

3. Water Quality (Drinking/Ground Water)

There would be no impacts to drinking or ground water under the proposed action.

4. Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

There are no wilderness or WSAs in the area of consideration so there would be no impacts to wilderness or WSAs under the proposed action.

5. Migratory Birds

There would be potential for minor impacts to habitat since the trough is proposed to be placed in a sagebrush community. Sagebrush, which is nesting habitat for Brewer's sparrow, sage thrasher, vesper sparrow, and sage sparrow, would be lost in the immediate vicinity of the trough due to use by livestock and wild horses. The impacts to migratory birds would be minor and birds displaced would find suitable habitat for nesting nearby.

Noncritical Elements:

1. Livestock Management

The direct effect to livestock management under the proposed action would be to provide water on the public land and prevent cattle from watering on private land west of the highway. This would provide adequate water in locations which would provide for good distribution of animals and utilization of rangeland forage. It would eliminate the hazard for people and livestock by preventing livestock access to the highway.

2. Wild Horses

Under the proposed action wild horses would have a sustainable habitat and would not create the hazard to the public traveling along Highway 205. The proposed location of water would allow for convenient wild horse viewing with a short walk from the South Loop Road yet hidden from view from the South Loop Road and Highway 205. The horses could be viewed and photographed without disturbing the animals and without off road vehicle traffic. The proposed location of water also provides for distribution of bands of horses with approximately 2.5 miles between water sources.

3. Recreation

Wild horse viewing and photography opportunities would be enhanced under the proposed action with improved public safety and reduced hazards with less disturbance of the animals. There would be no additional impacts to recreation anticipated under the proposed action.

4. Soils

Under the proposed action the soil would be dug up to bury the pipeline and put back to contour after the pipe is placed. Where the vegetation has been disturbed approximately a 3-foot strip the length of the line it would be seeded after it is put back to contour. This area would be seeded with a mixture of crested wheatgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, squirreltail, and Wyoming sagebrush, if available. This line would then be dragged with a small field harrow pulled by an ATV to cover the seed. These steps are necessary to establish a vegetation cover quickly and to inhibit noxious weed establishment. The soil would be removed at the overflow pond location. There would also be some soil compaction in the immediate area around the trough. The pipeline disturbance would be seeded to ensure no accelerated erosion would occur. The long-term impact to soils would be approximately 1/20 of an acre immediately surrounding the trough would have some soil compaction.

5. Vegetation

Under the proposed action the vegetation would be removed in approximately a width of 3 feet the length of the pipeline which would equal approximately one-half of an acre of vegetation disturbance. To mitigate the impacts of this vegetation disturbance, the soil would be returned to contour and the length of the pipeline would be broadcast seeded with a mixture of native and nonnative species to lessen the ability of noxious weeds to establish and to establish a perennial plant cover to hold the soil in place. There would be some vegetation disturbance from animals congregating and trampling immediately surrounding the trough and the overflow pond. The area of disturbance would be expected to be less than an acre. The proposed location of water would provide for livestock and wild horses to be more evenly distributed throughout this pasture. This would prevent heavy to severe utilization of forage plants in portions of the Hollywood Field Pasture.

6. Visual Resource Management

The proposed action would place watering facilities where they would be screened from view due to topography. The highway right-of-way fence would be readily apparent from the highway and the entrance to the South Loop Road.

To help mitigate the visual obtrusion of the fence all green posts would be used to construct the fence. However, the visual obtrusion of the highway right-of-way fence would be a long-term effect of the proposed action.

7. Wildlife

Under the proposed action a 4-strand barbed wire fence with the bottom strand smooth designed to facilitate wildlife movement would be constructed within the highway right-of-way. However, this is deer winter range and with fences on both sides of the highway deer movement could be restricted. The trough and overflow pond would be located on native plant communities with approximately 1.5 acres being directly affected. The overall utilization of forage species would be increased within one-half mile of the water source which could have a negative effect on this portion of the deer winter range if utilization is consistently heavy to severe. This would be mitigated by distributing livestock with adequate watering areas, controlling the timing and duration of use and periodic rest and managing wild horses at an AML.

D. Proposed Action Alternative (Cumulative Effects)

The cumulative effects of the proposed action would be a reduced safety hazard to the public on the portion of Highway 205 bordering Hollywood Field. Improved distribution of wild horses and livestock thereby improving management of forage plant species and plant communities. The addition of a water source would provide for a sustainable habitat for the Hollywood Field horses. The proposed watering location would provide the potential for the public to safely view these horses without disturbing the animals and without habitat impacts.

E. Alternative 1 (Pipe Water to Seeded Area) Anticipated Impacts

Critical Elements:

1. Cultural Heritage

The potential impacts to cultural heritage and mitigation would be as described for the proposed action.

2. Noxious Weeds

The potential impacts of noxious weeds and mitigation would be as described for the proposed action.

3. Water Quality (Drinking/Ground Water)

There would be no impacts to drinking or ground water under Alternative 1.

4. Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

There are no wilderness or WSAs in the area of consideration, therefore, there are no impacts to wilderness or WSAs under Alternative 1.

5. Migratory Birds

There would be no impacts to migratory birds under Alternative 1.

Noncritical Elements:

1. Livestock Management

The proposed location of water facilities under this alternative would not improve livestock distribution due to the proximity of the existing water source 1.5 miles to the north. Under this alternative the proposed location of water is in an area that receives heavy utilization from wild horses, antelope, deer, and livestock due to the plant species mix and current distance from water. The area has many native forage species, crested wheatgrass, and forage kochia in the plant community. This diversity of plant species increases protein levels through a longer season and the length of time forage is palatable to most grazing animals. If water were located here use would increase over present levels and the area would receive severe utilization.

2. Wild Horses

Under this alternative the location of the trough and overflow pond would be within 1.5 miles of existing water and would not improve the distribution of horses. This area receives heavy utilization from horses currently, the addition of water would increase this use. This would not allow yearlong water on this site to maintain plant community health. Providing an intermittent water source would not provide for sustainable habitat for the wild horses in Hollywood Field. This location would increase the visibility of these animals from Highway 205 which is undesirable for safety on Highway 205.

3. Recreation

Due to the location of the watering facilities proposed under this alternative, travelers on Highway 205 would view the horses from the highway which has the potential to continue the safety hazard at a reduced level. This site does not provide potential for photography of these animals. There are no other effects anticipated to recreation under this alternative.

4. Soils

The impacts to soils would be as described under the proposed action.

5. Vegetation

Under this alternative livestock and wild horse distribution would not be improved with utilization of forage species within one-half mile of the proposed trough and pond location receiving severe utilization. If this were allowed during critical growth periods during successive years plant community deterioration would be expected. This would be mitigated by providing water intermittently (when critical to supplement existing water source). This would assist in controlling the utilization level in this area. Other impacts would be as described for the proposed action.

6. Visual Resource Management

The watering facilities would not be screened from view under this alternative. Partial screening may be possible by locating the trough and overflow pond in a depression on the proposed hillside location. Other anticipated effects would be as described under the proposed action.

7. Wildlife

The impacts to this seeded site and mitigation measures would be similar to what was described for the proposed action. However, only periodic water would be provided on this site to regulate the amount of animal use to provide for plant community health.

F. Alternative 1 (Cumulative Effects)

The cumulative effects of Alternative 1 would be that the habitat for wild horses would not be sustainable because water could only be provided intermittently. There would only be partial visual screening of the trough and animals would be visible from Highway 205 while watering which would continue to cause people to pull onto the side of the highway. This may still provide some safety hazard. This site would not provide a satisfactory area for wild horse viewing.

G. Alternative 2 (Public Land Well) Anticipated Impacts

Critical Elements:

1. Cultural Heritage

The potential impacts and mitigating measures would be the same as described under the proposed action.

2. Noxious Weeds

The potential impacts and mitigating measures would be as described for the proposed action, however, there would be less area disturbed under this alternative.

3. Water Quality (Drinking/Ground Water)

There would be no known impacts to drinking or ground water except under this alternative there would be an additional well into the aquifer.

4. Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

There are no wilderness or WSAs in the area of consideration, therefore, there would be no impacts to wilderness or WSAs under this alternative.

5. Migratory Birds

The impacts to migratory birds would be the same as described under the proposed action.

Noncritical Elements:

1. Livestock Management

The impacts to livestock management would be the same as described under the proposed action.

2. Wild Horses

The impacts to wild horses would be the same as described under the proposed action.

3. Recreation

The impacts to recreation would be as described for the proposed action.

4. Soils

There would be soil disturbance on approximately 1/10 of an acre on the site where the well would be drilled. The overall impacts and mitigating measures would be as described for the proposed action.

5. Vegetation

The vegetation would be disturbed on approximately 1/10 of an acre where the well would be drilled. The other impacts would be as described for the proposed action.

6. Visual Resource Management

Although the proposed site for drilling a well would be in a low area and would not be visible from much of the surrounding landscape, the shelter to house the generator for the well may be visible. This shelter would be constructed with materials and in a manner that it would not be highly visible on the landscape. Other impacts would be as described under the proposed action.

7. Wildlife

The impacts to wildlife would be as described for the proposed action.

H. Alternative 2 (Cumulative Effects)

The cumulative effects of this alternative would be the same as described for the proposed action.

CHAPTER V: CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Notification of the EA will be published in the Burns Times-Herald in September.

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